

The Book of Romans

By Doug Hamilton

Romans 13:8-14 “Loving Your Neighbor”

The background of the phrase “Love Your Neighbor”

About 1440 BC, Moses received the Ten Commandments from God. During this same period God also revealed the accompanying ordinances of the application of the Law. Leviticus chapter 19 records some of the various practices to be carried out in the relationships of the Israelites towards each other. In verse 18 we first find mentioned in the Scriptures what is referred to as the Golden Rule. Leviticus 19:18, “*You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.*”

This principle, “*love your neighbor as yourself*”, is found throughout the New Testament, but is first mentioned in Matthew 19. A rich young ruler came to Jesus, asking what must he do to inherit eternal life. Jesus instructed in verse 17, “*...if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.*” He further explained concerning the commandments, “*YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS; ¹⁹ HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.*” Jesus associated love for a neighbor with the *human relations* mandates from the Ten Commandments.

This fact becomes much clearer when Jesus was asked a similar question by a lawyer in Matthew 22:36, “*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?*” The Christ told him, “*‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.*”

The Jews of Jesus’ day viewed the Ten Commandments from a two-fold perspective, loving God and loving their fellow man. The first five of the commandments dealt with their direct relationship with God. The second five were associated with their indirect relationship with God carried through their interactions with one another. They were to demonstrate value for the lives of their fellow man, show reverence for the covenant of marriage, respect for other people’s property, carryout a passion for the truth and sanctification of the heart. By not treating their neighbor a love that they would also like to be shown, it would result in serious offense to God.

This explains the caution Jesus expressed for the begrudging soul attempting to be right with God without reconciling with their brother. Matthew 5:23-24, “*Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.*”

Jesus explicitly taught that our relationship with our fellow man can influence our outcome with God. He taught in the pattern of prayer, “*For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.*” (Matthew 6:14-15) He further spoke in Matthew 18:35 that great judgment will come upon all who “*...does not forgive his brother from your heart.*”

The human relationship factor was again emphasized in James 2:8-9, “*If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,’ you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are*

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convicted by the law as transgressors.” Paul also warned Christians to adhere to this principle in Galatians 5:13-14, “*For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*”¹⁴ *For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’*”

The teachings of the New Testament acknowledge that we will be held accountable if we fail to demonstrate the “Love of Neighbor” principle for our fellow man. It was with that in mind that Paul continued his teaching in Romans 13:8-14.

Romans 13:8-9, “*Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.*”⁹ *For this, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET,’ and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’*¹⁰ *Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*”

Paul makes a play on words from the previous verse concerning our obligation to pay our taxes in verse 7. “*Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.*” Not only do we have the responsibility to render taxes and honor for the government, but we also render love and compassion in our communal obligation to one another. We are to not interact with others in ways which call for vengeance and payback, but to bring the out the best in people. **YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF!**

This is a simple principle, but very difficult to carryout. It is accomplished through learning to live our lives in purity with God. When we focus in that area of our lives, then our treatment to others naturally improves.

Romans 13:11-12, “*Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.*”¹² *The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.*”

Paul used an analogy of day and night in comparison to behaviors of darkness and light. This was a common phraseology found throughout the New Testament.

- Jesus proclaimed in John 8:12, “*I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.*”
- He directed others in John 12:36, “*While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.*”
- Again He spoke in Matthew 5:16, “*Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*”
- The people of God are to *walk in the light as Jesus is in the light* (1 John 1:7).
- Paul said in Ephesians 5:8 “*...for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light.*”
- Again he said in 1 Thessalonians 5:5, “*for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness.*”

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The lives of Christians are not camouflaged with darkness, but in the broad daylight of God. We do not live two lives, one when people see us in the light and the other in the darkness of sin. They were to set aside their *deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light*.

Romans 13:13-14, “*Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.* ¹⁴ *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.*”

What were the *deeds of darkness* which they were to lay aside? They are the sins which thrive in the darkness.

Sins of Excess: Carousing and Drunkenness

The word used here “*carousing*” is *komos* and means to engage in revelry until the late hours at night. It does not refer to a New Year’s Eve get-together, but that which is the life of a partying glutton, living for the moment and looking to indulge themselves. We live in a culture of excess and it shows in our health. We must be careful not to engorge ourselves.

It is the Greek word for “*drunkenness*” is *methe*, and it obviously refers to intoxication through the use of alcohol. Though the Jewish and Greek world of the first century used alcohol, it was used for disinfectant of water. Being drunk was a shameful thing to those cultures. It used to be the same in our culture, but this has changed. Drunkenness is something which is promoted by the society, from high schools to colleges, from private parties at homes to public bars. We must resist the pull from this type of behavior. We must shed the sins of excess if we are ever to show reverence for the *Love Your Neighbor* principle.

Sins of Immorality: Sexual Promiscuity and Sensuality

“*Sexual promiscuity*” is *koite* and refers to the defiling of one’s bed. It can be adultery, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, incest, bestiality, necrophilia and even pornography. We live in a society which makes attempts to heavily influence this generation to take a path of sexual immorality. The fruits of this tree have been many broken hearts, broken marriages and broken relationships with God.

The word Paul used for “*sensuality*” is *aselgeia*. It is also of a sexual nature, but that which produces no shame. Immorality used to be a shameful thing in our culture. Adulterated marriages were frowned upon. Teen pregnancy was dealt with privately. Losing one’s virginity prior to marriage was frowned upon. That has all changed in the last generation. The sexual revolution has taken a toll not only on the world, but also in the church. These *deeds of darkness* found in immorality must be shed from our lives or there can be no *Love Your Neighbor*.

Sins of Divisiveness: Strife and Jealousy

Strife, *eris* in the Greek, is the unholy spirit of competition. It comes from a longing to possess power and status among your contemporaries. It is the attitude which says, “I will win no matter what, even if I must bend the rules to come out on top!” It is the opposite of the humility which Jesus calls for the church family to have.

The word for “*jealousy*” is *zelos*. It refers to the issue of the heart which longs to have someone else’s blessings, status and power. It is that unholy, narcissistic attitude which cannot understand why someone else has something that you do not. It is the opposite of the

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contentment we are to have in Jesus. We must put away the sins of division which can threaten the *Love Your Neighbor* principle of the church.

What was the *armor of light* they were to put on in place of what was shed? We are to put on Christ of course! We initially put Him on in baptism as Paul confirmed in Galatians 3:27, “*For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*” We continue being clothed in Jesus by living a godly life. Ephesians 4:24, “*and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*” We must make a conscious effort to live spiritually for God, lest we shed Christ and put back on the deeds of darkness. There is no neutrality in this life.

In Summary

“Love Thy Neighbor As Yourself” can only work if we first make sure to love ourselves enough to live for Jesus on a daily basis. If you value your soul, then you can value the souls of others.